

Zoli N.E. Double Rifle!



RIFLE

Sporting Firearms Journal

**Marlin's
#75
Bolt Action**

**Accuracy
Problems?
Find the
Cure!**



**Outfitter's Dream:
7mm STW Guide Rifle**

March 2011

No. 255

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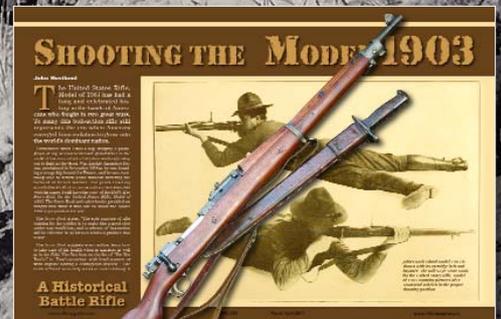


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On the cover . . .

The custom stainless Remington Model 700 7mm STW is fitted with a Swarovski 3-10x scope mounted in Burris rings and bases. (See "Spotting Scope," page 8, for more details.) Rifle photo by G. Hudson. Mule deer photo by Vic Schendel.



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PILLAR BEDDING

LIGHT GUNSMITHING

by Gil Sengel

The problem that pillar bedding addresses has been known for a very long time. That is, wood expands, shrinks, compresses, warps and bends (sometimes all at the same time). Serious hunters have always been annoyed by this trait.

No doubt early mammoth hunters were also affected. After all, anyone chasing those critters carrying only a pointed rock tied to the end of a stick has to be considered serious. For example, after lashing a new spitzer pointed rock to his spear shaft, Thud the hunter leans it against the wall of his cave. That night, Thud's teenage son comes in late and trips over the spear. (Why teenagers do such things is still not fully understood.) It falls over and lands near the campfire.

The next morning our hunter is running late. He picks up his spear, can't remember leaving it there, attributes that to his getting old and dashes out of the cave. On the first opportunity for a mammoth in weeks, what seems like a perfect throw hits too far back and doesn't penetrate. It turns out the spear warped a bit as it lay by the campfire the night before.

Instead of falling over dead, the mammoth lets out a blood-curdling scream, tosses Thud into the bushes and squashes his hunting buddy before running off. Oh, well, looks like leftovers again tonight – and one can only imagine what leftovers were like at this point in history!

Fortunately, hunters today have it better than Thud. Wood warpage, expansion, etc. have no ballistic effect on a bullet. Its energy and trajectory are unchanged,



This hot glue-like material was picked out of the recoil lug area of the Model 70 stock.

but it won't hit where the sights say it should. This part is not good.

All manner of solutions to wood's behavior have been tried, from inletting metal rods into the stock to soaking the thing in various chemicals. Nothing really worked until the advent of epoxy compounds. Even then the epoxy (generally called *glass bedding* because glass fibers are added to the mix) only guarantees perfect

bedding at one moment in history. The wood could still warp and take the bedding surface with it. Grinding out the old epoxy and rebedding was the only solution.

Eventually it was determined the real way to control wood was to replace it. A big piece of aluminum called a *bedding block* was epoxied between the action and the trigger guard/floorplate assembly of bolt guns. It was then milled out just like the stock would have been. Invisible from the outside, the stock looked normal in all respects. Everyone was happy, but the work was time consuming and expensive.

Then came stocks made from the same materials as bass boats and toothbrush handles. These were supposedly *the* answer. Development of the gunstock had reached perfection – until it was discovered that in hot weather the plastic got squishy and even fiberglass could compress from guard screw pressure. Back to the drawing board.

Now pillar bedding is all the rage. It is far cheaper than a bed-



Rough up the receiver ring area before applying glass-bedding compound. The stock must be properly bedded before installing pillars.

ding block and almost as good in wood; in plastic/fiberglass stocks it solves the compression problem. Pillars will, of course, do nothing to prevent a forend from warping. They will also not stop the wood from twisting or bending in the action or grip area.

Pillar bedding consists of simply placing solid aluminum or steel spacers (pillars) between the bottom of a bolt-action receiver and its trigger guard/floor-plate assembly. Usually .5 inch in diameter and epoxied in place, these pillars are drilled to allow the guard screws to pass through the center. Also, the idea isn't new. Forty years ago the pillars



A bedding pad is shown at the forend of the stock. Its use is explained in the text.



This photo shows the rear tang contact area of the Model 70 stock.



Rubber bands hold the barreled receiver in the stock when glass bedding. Placement here is for bedding the rear tang area.

were called *stock spacers* and glued in place. And, yes, Mauser used a similar idea long before that but didn't glue them into the stock. Some early bolt-action target guns had the outside of the pillars/spacers threaded. They were then screwed into the wood to overcome the glue problem. Nothing is really new.

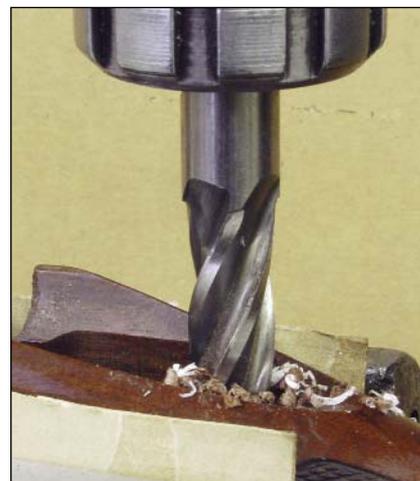
The Featherweight Winchester Model 70 XTR shown in the illustrations was picked because it had several bedding problems. One was that it had some kind of hot glue-looking compound applied to the recoil lug area by the factory. The barreled action was glued in the stock and couldn't be removed! Heat eventually broke this bond. The rifle was purchased new in 1986.

Pillar bedding is easy to do, but certain rules must be followed or little will be accomplished. Obviously, it is necessary to get the bedding right before adding pillars. In the case of the Model 70, all the hot glue had to first be removed. When this was accomplished, it was discovered the barreled receiver only touched the stock in two places: a bedding pad at the forend tip and under the rear tang. Thus the receiver ring area and first one inch of the barrel had to be properly bedded with a couple of applications of Brownells ACRA-GLAS. The barreled receiver was held in the stock by heavy rubber bands at the two contact points of forend tip and rear tang. It must be done this way to prevent any bending or deforming pressure on metal or wood that could affect the bedding.

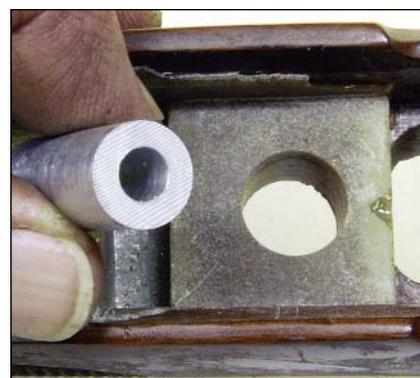
Next, wood was removed from



Bedding pillars are easily made on a metal lathe, or they can be purchased.



Drill out the guard screw holes to accept the pillars.



The pillar and the drilled-out recess for the front guard screw.



Epoxy has been poured into the recess area around the pillar.



When epoxy cures, the pillar is flush with the bottom of the receiver. No work is necessary here.



The bottom of the pillar is now cut down to provide a perfect fit with the floorplate tang. This gives solid metal-to-metal contact between the receiver and the bottom metal.

the rear tang area and replaced with glass bedding compound. Rubber bands were now placed at the forend tip and receiver ring, because the receiver was now bedded properly. Later the bedding pad at the forend tip would be sanded out and the barrel free floated.

With barreled receiver correctly fitted to the stock it was time to install the pillars. The illustrations show the process better than words can describe it. Simply put, existing guard screw holes are lined up with the drill press quill using a drill that will just fit through the holes. The stock is then clamped in the drill press vise. Guard screw holes are drilled out to a diameter slightly larger than the pillars, say $\frac{9}{16}$ inch or a bit more for .5-inch diameter pillars. Incidentally, pillars themselves are easily made on a lathe or purchased from suppliers such as Brownells. Some custom stockmakers and gunsmiths also sell pillars to do-it-yourself gun owners. The hole through the pillar should be *the same as the guard screw diameter*. More on this in a moment.

Epoxying the pillars into the stock may now seem like a daunting task. It's actually quite simple. There are various ideas on this, but in my humble opinion there is only one. The pillars must fit the bottom of the action perfectly. The Model 70 is flat, so ends of pillars are flat and square. On round-bottom actions, pillars must be filed to fit. Next, enough material is removed from the opposite ends of the pillars to allow the guard screws to clamp them to the receiver by at least two threads.

The barreled receiver/pillar-guard screw assembly is then clamped firmly into the stock by wraps of vinyl tape or heavy rubber bands. We have now prevented most all the errors possible with such jobs – provided the holes in the pillars are the same diameter as the guard screws. Pillars cannot move out of position before epoxying. They must,



The solid fiberglass bedding pad is shown under the first one inch of the barrel. This is standard bedding procedure.

however, protrude just slightly from the bottom of the stock to allow fitting to create a solid metal-to-metal joint with the trigger guard/floorplate assembly.

All that remains is to pour epoxy into the recess between the pillar and stock. This may require two applications as the epoxy settles into the narrow recess. Coating the inside of the recess with epoxy just before installing the barreled receiver helps.

After the epoxy has cured (don't hurry this, let each batch cure at least 24 hours), fitting the trigger guard/floorplate, relieving behind the rear tang (if applicable) and drilling relief for guard screws remains to be done. Drilling out the screw holes is done with two drills in $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch steps, giving $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch relief. This is almost always enough. A hand-held electric drill is sufficient, because the amount of material removed is so small that if the drill bit is anywhere



After all other work is completed, the bedding pad is rasped out at the forend tip to free float the barrel.



Relieving the rear of the tang on the Model 70 must be done to prevent splitting of wood in the grip area.

near sharp it will center itself in the hole instantly.

Though I don't currently have an example for photos, pillar bedding is not limited to bolt guns. Loose buttstocks on Model 94 Winchesters and Model 336 Marlins can be tightened by installing a pillar in the stock for the tang screw. The pillar is made up as a spacer of exactly the correct length, then epoxied in place. After installation, placing epoxy bedding full length under the top and bottom tangs guarantees the stock will stay tight just about forever.

Pillar bedding may not be a classic operation, but it sure works. Best of all, with a bit of patience, it is easily done by the amateur gunsmith. R



The last operation is enlarging holes through the pillars to prevent guard screws from touching the sides. If they touch, accuracy will suffer.

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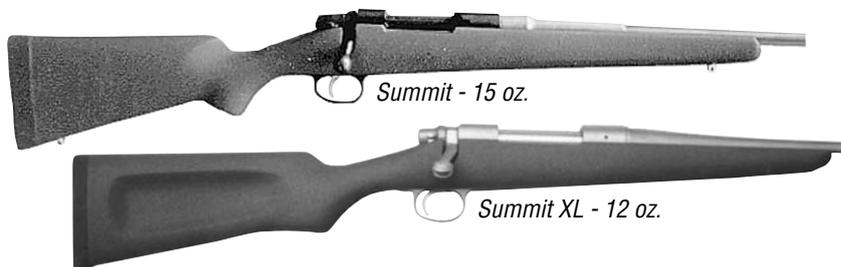
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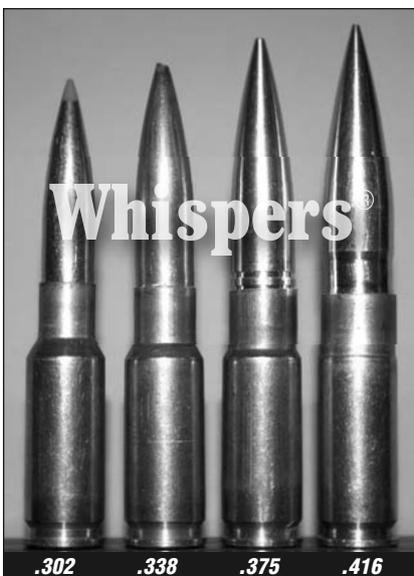
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Facing page, the .450/400 is an ideal Alaskan caliber. Above, unlike frangible, expensive side-by-side doubles, the Zoli thrived in wet Alaskan conditions.



Phil Shoemaker

For a country that considers itself a nation of riflemen, double-barreled rifles have never made much of an impact on this side of the pond. Although Anglophiles, aficionados and African hunters consider them to be the pinnacle of the gunmaker's art, most Americans consider them in the realm of two-and-a-half-ton work trucks – large, heavy and extraordinarily expensive for every day use and nowhere nearly as useful, or accurate, as our lever- and bolt-action rifles. Maybe if the majority of our dangerous mega-fauna like saber-toothed cats, steppe lions, woolly mammoths and mastodons hadn't died out with the Pleistocene, we might have looked at things differently.



Zoli frames are made of solid, forged steel.

Large-bore double rifles were developed more than a century ago for hunters pursuing the large, dangerous game of India and Africa. At the time they were the only means to provide a hunter with a quick, reliable second shot in a rifle that was powerful enough for the job. Even today, for the specialized purpose of following wounded quarry into dense brush, where a quickly delivered second shot may determine the life or death of the hunter, they are the choice of many African professional hunters. Unfortunately the design is expensive to produce, and older English and continental doubles are being snapped up by collectors. Few modern manufacturers have the capabilities to make them; fewer still have the knowledge to do it correctly.

The Italian firm of Antonio Zoli can be traced back as far as 1490 and is now under the guidance of Antonio's son Paolo. With a vision for the future, he made the strategic decision to upgrade their facilities with state-of-the-art 3D Cad/Cam systems with CNC and spark eroding, EDM machines. Today, with everything

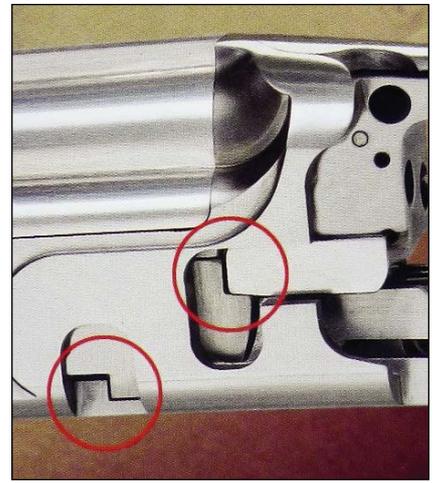
from locks, stocks to barrels being made in-house, they offer world-class firearms that are second to none in engineering, performance and reliability. Zoli's forged, monolithic frames have withstood more than 81,000 psi in the Italian national proof house.

Over the past year, I have been carrying one of its .450/400 NE 3-inch Z-Express rifles here in Alaska. The rifle is based on its rugged and competition-proven O&U Z-Gun action. The receiver is forged and machined, and the model I chose is coated with a subdued, rust-resistant silver finish. It also comes with a blued receiver or, if you prefer more bling, you can order the fully engraved Ambassador EL or SL

A removable trigger plate and action are valuable assets in rugged Alaskan conditions.



They are the choice of many African professional hunters.

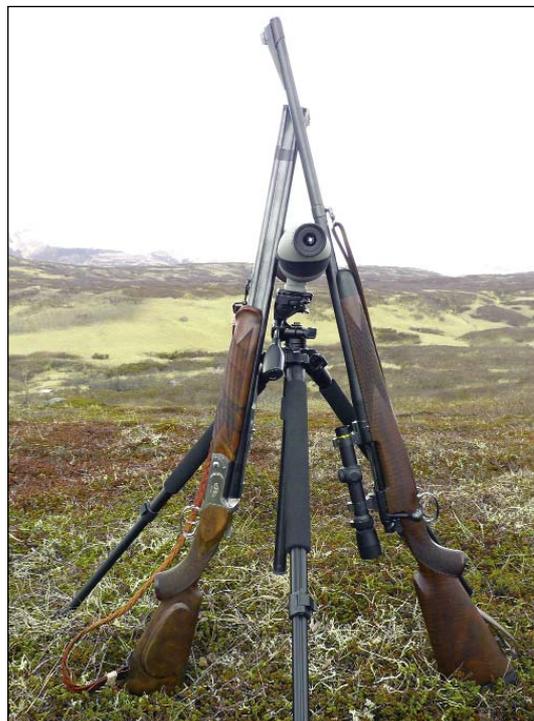


Tight, well-fitting, midlevel and bottom barrel lugs engage the frame for rugged lockup.

grade with African game scenes and gold highlights. There is even a LUX model from Zoli's custom shop, with no-holds-barred engraving and wood options that are as artfully rendered as any Italian masterpiece.

On all the rifles, the trigger group is independent from the action and isolated from the stress of firing. All critical parts are titanium nitrate treated for corrosion resistance, and the entire unit is easily removable for cleaning. Those features are unique to Zoli and make this the first big-bore double rifle that I consider truly usable in rugged, harsh conditions like those found in Alaska. All .450/400s come with double triggers as standard, but you can order a single trigger

Zoli Double Rifle



Above, in dangerous game rifles, familiarity is your friend. The Zoli rifle is as familiar and effective as Phil's Italian O&U shotguns. Right, the Zoli double rifle is shorter and lighter in weight than many classic bolt actions.

or even a complete spare if you prefer. At only 8 pounds, 10 ounces, the .450/400 is much lighter, better balanced and quicker to shoulder than any English rifle I have seen of the same caliber.

The .450/400 Nitro Express 3-inch was introduced by Jeffery in the late 1890s as a smokeless powder round. It is also commonly referred to as simply the .400 Jeffery, in order to separate

Zoli's world-class firearms are second to none in engineering.

it from the older .450/400 3¼-inch that was originally a black-powder round. I have a copy of a 1902 Kynoch catalog, and it lists the ballistics of the 3-inch version with 60 grains of cordite and a 400-grain bullet at 2,125 fps. Until the ascension of Holland's .375, in less expensive bolt actions, the .400 Jeffery was the most common all-around caliber used by Asia- and Africa-bound hunters. Virtually all manufacturers built rifles in the caliber, but most, if not all, were built on the same frames as the larger .450, .470 and .500 NE calibers and weighed in excess of 10 pounds. For a cartridge with a recoil level of the .375, that weight is an unnecessary burden.

Although the .375 H&H eventu-

ally rose to prominence as an all-around, flat-shooting caliber, the fans of the .400 Jeffery steadfastly maintained that its larger bullets delivered a heavier blow at close range. It was Jim Corbett's favorite for hunting man-eating tigers in India. John Taylor wrote that it was adequate for any African game under almost

any circumstances. Elmer Keith claimed that the ideal rifle for following a wounded brown bear into the thick alders would be a .450/400 double.

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Classic SxS English doubles, like this Watson Bros .450/400, are overly heavy and tend to shoot apart at distance, making longer shots problematic.

I'm not sure how many bears Elmer ever had to wrinkle out of alders, but there have been numerous times while I was trailing

Phil used the Zoli to take this Kodiak blacktail at 130 yards.



Zoli Double Rifle

wounded bruins in thick pucker brush where an instantly available second shot would have been mighty comforting. The ability to instantly fire a second shot by simply pulling the trigger, rather than having to first work a bolt or lever, is where double rifles excel. They may not have the versatility of long-range accuracy, but a large, onrushing beast intent on your destruction does not require subtleties.

The heyday of the heavy double rifle was during the era where the sun never set on the British Empire. Having perfected the side-by-side shotgun, it was natural that British rifle designs would follow. The problem is that shotguns are short-range firearms, and it was no great feat to regulate their patterns to overlap at those ranges. Rifles, on the other hand, can and often need to be fired at varying ranges. With the SxS design the barrels are regulated so they both shoot to the same point of impact at only one range (usually between 50 and 100 yards), and they continue to diverge to the left and right beyond that. That is the primary reason doubles are considered specialized, short-range rifles.

Not being constrained by a nationalistic style, other continental makers built rifles with barrels in the O&U configuration. Anglophiles, of course, can enumerate numerous minor esoteric reasons why the O&U design will never be as great as the classic, staid, English SxS guns, but the main reason is that they just jolly well aren't cricket.

I shoot both English SxS and Italian O&U shotguns and find no fault with either. Like most competitive shooters, however, I find that I shoot more consistently day in and day out with the O&U design. I suppose it's due to the single sighting plane I am familiar with. With the Zoli rifle I felt right at home, as the double shotguns I use most often are my



Phil usually carries the rifle with empty chambers, but a knife pouch on his belt holds two rounds for quick loading.

1937 vintage sidelock Beretta and a svelte 28-gauge Prandelli-Gasperini. Like the Zoli, they have double triggers. *On a dangerous game rifle, familiarity is your friend.*

The regulating of barrels is an arcane art that Zoli is particularly proud of. The company guarantees its rifles will shoot both barrels into 1.5 inches at 50 meters, and now the rifles are regulated

Phil and hunter Doug Alexander with 9-foot brown bear taken during a spring 2010 hunt.



with the new Hornady ammunition. My rifle, however, is an early version that was built while Zoli was waiting on the new Hornady ammunition to arrive. It had been used as a demo at numerous shows, and there was no test target with it; but Paolo told me it had been regulated with Kynoch ammunition. Hornady ammunition perfectly matches the 2,125 to 2,150 fps velocity figures that Kynoch advertises, but I could not get the two barrels on my rifle to shoot to the same point of impact except at under 20 yards. This is good enough for a backup rifle, as the last bear I had to stop was at half that distance.

At the SCI convention in Reno last year, I met a Floridian, Nelson Lopez-Reyes, who has another early Zoli rifle that was regulated with Kynoch ammunition. He graciously sent me some of his loads. Using Hornady brass and bullets with 77.5 grains of IMR-4350, his rifle prints both barrels within an inch at 50 yards. His ammunition in my rifle gave 2,173 fps from the bottom barrel and 2,178 fps from the top but still printed them 5 to 7 inches apart, depending on whether I used iron sights or a scope. I played with Hornady and Woodleigh solids and softs, as well as Swift 350- and 400-grain .411 A-Frames and tried various loads with all bullets with IMR-4350 and H-4831, but the results still eluded me. I am still hoping that when I can get a can of Reloder 15 powder, I can find a load that regulates with the excellent Swift 350- or 400-grain A-Frames.

I did learn that both barrels were exceedingly accurate and with Hornady ammunition would consistently shoot three shots into an inch. I took a different tact. Both barrels were regulated perfectly in line horizontally, which is not possible with a SxS. I had mounted a little 2½x Leupold compact scope on the quarter-rib with Talley bases and rings. With the scope and the iron



The Zoli travels easily in this takedown case.

sights the bottom barrel was sighted in at 100 yards. The top barrel turned out to be sighted in for 325 yards. In effect I had two accurate single-shot rifles (which

has always been one of the benefits attributed to double rifles) that I knew the trajectory of and that were quite accurate. *Not only did I have a reliable double*

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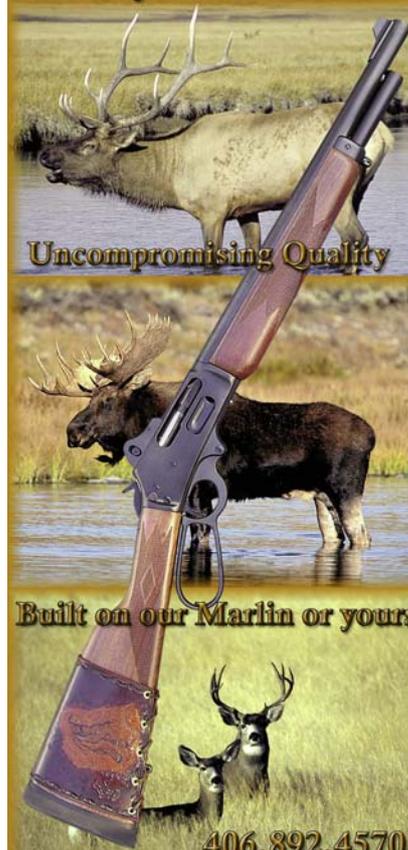
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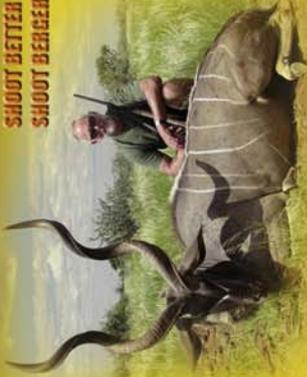
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Zoli Double Rifle

rifle for handling close-range charges, but I also could consistently make hits out at bolt-action ranges. I was beginning to like this rifle.

Last fall, over the Thanksgiving holiday, my wife and I joined our son and some friends on Kodiak Island for a blacktail deer hunt. After a full season of guiding it was a great break. That late in the season the snow has driven the deer down to the grassy benches overlooking the wind-swept beaches. Most shots would not be much over 100 yards; although the power of the .400 Jeffery was unnecessary for deer, some of the brown bears on Kodiak have learned to associate gunfire with food. A big-bore double is comforting to carry in brown bear habitat. When I finally located a suitable buck, I was able to stalk within 130 yards, and a single Hornady DGS solid placed just behind the shoulder put him down with virtually no meat loss. I certainly didn't baby the rifle, and it shrugged off the rain, snow and saltwater spray as easily as any of my bolt rifles.

This past spring brown bear season on the Alaska Peninsula proved to be a more stringent test of the rifle's weather resistance. It rained every day of the entire 16-day season. I wiped the outside and the bore of the rifle with Corrosion X before the hunt and, although the stock showed a little swelling at the end of the season, the rifle suffered no ill effects. After the hunt was over, it was easier to unscrew the single captive Allen screw that holds the trigger plate in the receiver to remove it than it is to strip a bolt-action rifle.

Fortunately I did not have to fire the rifle during bear season, as the hunter, Doug Alexander,

could shoot. We stalked to within 90 yards of a nine-foot boar that was feeding on a steep hillside. Doug was using a new Tikka .338 with some older Winchester 230-grain Fail Safe ammunition. His first shot passed just behind the near shoulder and broke the off shoulder of the boar before exiting. The bruin spun to bite at the wound, put his weight on the broken shoulder, tumbled to the bottom of the snow-filled draw, hit and never got up. That is how it is supposed to happen.

All critical parts are titanium nitrate treated for corrosion resistance.

A guide's double rifle is like an expensive insurance premium. You hope to never need it, but considering you are the beneficiary rather than your heirs, it is a bargain – especially since it can usually be cashed in when you are done with it for as much or more than you paid. AIG doesn't offer that – or the service and guarantee of Zoli.

Steven Lamboy, the general manager here in the U.S., has said Zoli takes its accuracy guarantee seriously and that if I do not find a load that regulates to the company's stringent requirements, the folks at Zoli back in Gardone will re-regulate the rifle.

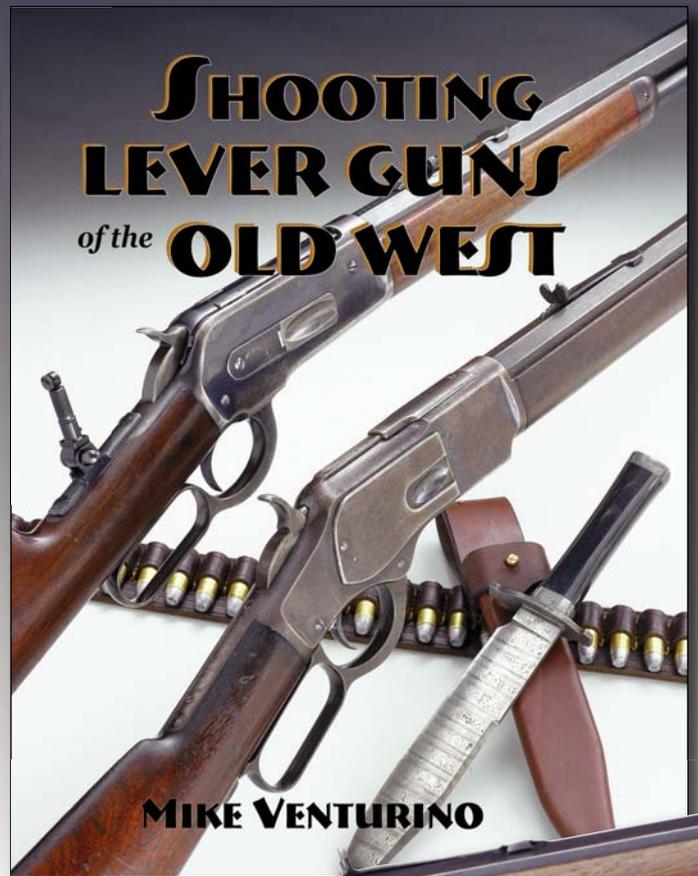
Currently the basic Zoli Z-Express in .450/400 is priced at \$10,000. That is not cheap, but it is by far the biggest bargain in the field of double rifles. It combines simple, rugged, conservative performance with ultra-modern manufacturing techniques. I showed one to a famous Tanzanian PH while at SCI last year, and Paolo told me that two of his younger PHs placed orders the following day.

For more information contact: Antonio Zoli, N.A., 3603 E. Ridge Run, Canandaiua NY 14424; e-mail: zguns@rochester.rr.com; or online at: www.zoli.it

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